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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 000411

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STATE FOR WHA, WHA/PPC, WHA/USOAS, AND WHA/CEN

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SUBJECT: HONDURAN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES UPDATE 2:
PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS PEPE LOBO WINS IN A LANDSLIDE, NOW
POSITIONED AS FRONT-RUNNER FOR NOVEMBER GENERAL ELECTION

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 393

[B](#). TEGUCIGALPA 410

Classified By: Political Counselor Francisco Palmieri;
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) Sitting President of Congress Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo Sosa is on his way to a decisive landslide victory in the February 20 Nationalist Party primary leading his chief opponent, Miguel Pastor, Mayor of Tegucigalpa, with almost two-thirds of the vote. With 18.5 percent of the precincts reporting, Lobo is winning 64 per cent of the valid votes. Pastor, whose public approval ratings had been in the 70 percent range as late as last October and who was polling in the 50 percent range in December, proved to have a glass jaw which Lobo's "clenched fist" campaign symbol smashed in the February 20 voting. Pastor received just 34 percent of the Nationalist Party primary vote.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The unanticipated size of Pepe Lobo's victory will instantly convert him into the perceived front-runner for the November general election. Pastor's concession speech, punctuated by his own acknowledgment of the unexpected size of his defeat, however underscored many of his hard-hitting campaign themes which will challenge Lobo as he seeks to unite the Nationalist Party for the November election. Lobo will have a significant mandate to call on his party's opposition elements to unite behind his nomination. He immediately used his victory speech to reach out to the three losing candidates by telling them the door is open to join his movement. Privately, many analysts believe that Lobo's campaign team will deal severely with the leaders of Pastor's extremely negative closing campaign.

[1](#)3. (C) The Organization of American States (OAS) observation mission in conjunction with the Mission's observation effort conducted a quick count for the election, which confirmed the size of Lobo's victory and provided the measure of confidence to report the victory in the face of the Supreme Election Tribunal's (TSE) very slow preliminary count. As of 2300 hours, the TSE had counted just 18.5 percent of the total precincts in the seven hours since the polls had closed. The OAS quick count predicted Lobo will poll 63 percent of the final vote. It also showed that Liberal Party candidate Mel Zelaya will exceed 50 percent of the Liberal primary vote. Interestingly, the total voter participation in the Liberal Party primary was running about 5 percent ahead of participation in the Nationalist primary.

[1](#)4. (C) COMMENT: While Mel Zelaya scored an equally decisive victory on February 20 over his Liberal party opponents, Lobo's victory far exceeded expectations and he is now positioned to seize the front-runner's mantle for the November general election. The size of Lobo's victory and the ensuing political momentum Lobo will have from it will force Zelaya to change his strategy of remaining above the political fray, which he managed to do during the Liberal primary campaign because none of his challengers were ever close. If Zelaya does not adapt quickly and directly engage Lobo on the Honduran population's key issues -- economic concerns, jobs and security -- Lobo may be able to deliver a quick knockout blow this spring from which Zelaya may never recover. If history is any indicator, the front-runner in the national polls at Easter has won every national general election, save one. END COMMENT.
Pierce